

three

WARM UP GAMES

Starting a Session

Starting a session is very important because it sets the tone for everything to follow. Gather everyone together in a circle – a circle is a symbol of equality and is the least hierarchical of structures into which to welcome everyone.

‘Well, hello everybody, welcome to Play-World. Tonight there is an open space, and some recorded music, but no TV, no movies, no experts, just us!’

Introduce yourself and the purpose of this time to be spent together. When the group are mainly strangers to each other, and when they are unfamiliar with this kind of activity, it is most important to start in a way which is as unthreatening as possible.

Get them to breathe deeply, stretch the body and then make sounds.

A good exercise at this point is:

Dump the ‘Shit’

This exercise encourages participants to dump the ‘shit’ (or ‘stuff’ or ‘angst’ if you prefer politeness!) of the day.

Breathe deeply and throw the angst of the day, whatever you wish to let go of, into the middle of the circle with a big sound.

This is an extract from
The Book of Games and Warm Ups for Group Leaders
by Leo Rutherford published by Singing Dragon

This always gets energy moving and also gives you a feeling for the mood of the group. It is also like exorcising whatever concerns or anxieties the people are carrying from the outside world so that they, and you, can all 'be here now'.

Now continue the process.

Rag Doll

Shake loose various parts of the body; hands, arms, feet, legs and whole body as if it were a rag doll; and while you are doing this, mumble!

Another way to continue warming up is:

Funniest Joke

Imagine someone has just told the funniest joke in the universe and let yourself laugh (20–30 seconds maximum).

A good follow-on exercise I have often used to get people feeling more present and ready to play is:

Italian Breathing

Imagine you are an Italian – naturally you express everything with your hands. Take three deep breaths and use your arms to bring the breath to you. Then crouch down. Breathe in while coming up to standing, lift your arms above your head, stretch and complete the inbreath. Exhale and gradually sink back down to crouching. Repeat this sequence two or three times.

Then, standing, breathe in like an Italian with all the help you can get from your arms; look at someone across the circle and on the outbreath throw a sound across to them.

This gets people properly aerated and the last part generates interaction and usually some laughter and relaxation.

Spiral

Start with a standing circle, holding hands. You can use recorded music of your choice, but a very nice way to do this is to get everyone singing a simple song or chant. For example, a Native American chant like this:

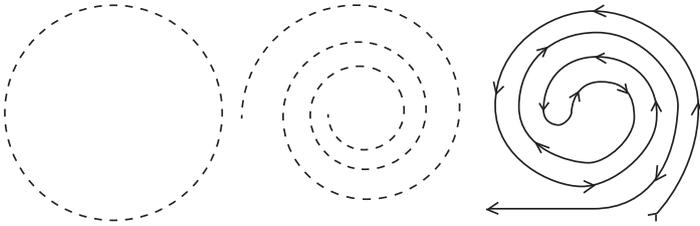
'Earth my body, water my blood,
Air my breath and fire my spirit.'

Or this Arapaho Ghost Dance song:

'I circle around, I circle around, the boundaries of the earth,
wearing my long wing feathers as I fly.'

(Both these chants can be learned from the tape and booklet I made with a group of friends – *Forty-Four Chants – Words and Music* [see Resources]. They are very easy to learn and to teach, as people can pick them up in a few moments.)

When you have got the chant going, let go with your right hand and lead the circle to your right, with everyone following you, into a spiral formation winding inward. As you come into the centre and when the circle is tightening into a spiral but not too tight, turn sharply and then wind around the opposite way, reversing direction. When you are back on the outside, reverse direction again and then wind the circle back into a spiral, finishing when the circle is as tight as is comfortable (see diagram).



Before you start, invite everyone as they spiral around to 'see' the other people they are about to spend time with, and to let themselves 'be seen'. This formation movement enables everyone to make a connection with everyone else.

Moving Circle

This is another nice and very simple way to achieve the same feeling of meeting:

Everyone stands in a circle, holding hands. Put on some nice music of your choice. Holding with both hands, move in towards the people opposite, gently pulling the people either side of you. Then pull out, and then in and out and so on until the circle moves in and out and around on its own and all sorts of things happen spontaneously.

Chants

Put a candle in the centre and invite everyone to sit around in a circle.

Singing chants together is very beautiful and evocative. Simple well-known songs such as 'Michael Row the Boat' or 'Kumbaya' or 'Row, Row, Row Your Boat' are also really chants in that they convey a feeling and are simple, repetitive and easy to learn. Chanting is not music *per se* and is not about singing 'well' or in

tune. Chanting is about meditation, it's about a feeling, a sense of togetherness and oneness.

Call and Response

The Ancients in many parts of the world would ease their work by chanting. One person would 'call' a simple melody, usually in eight beats, 'Hey heyo ya ho' and the others would answer like an echo, 'Hey heyo ya ho'. The words and melody of the call vary and it works well to invite all who wish to take a turn at calling. This is a great way to get a group's energy moving.

A variation on that is:

Hoeing or Digging

Get everyone in the circle to turn to the right (only because most are right handed) and start to mime hoeing the ground. Then start the call and response.

Having got everyone breathing, feeling relaxed, at ease and comfortable about being there, the next stage is to get them meeting each other and interacting.

Name Games

Name games are necessary warmers unless you opt for name tags. Personally I dislike being 'labelled', but it does serve its purpose if you have a group of more than 40. Here are some games to avoid tags. My favourite is the first one.

Whisper Name Game

Ask participants to mill around and make contact; each person is to whisper their *own* name in the ears of the others.

After a minute or two ring a bell, bang a gong, clap or what you will – to get everyone’s attention. Ask them to continue mingling and as they meet someone to whisper the *other person’s* name in that person’s ear! Tell them if they forget just to make a guess – their partner will correct them if necessary.

This causes great hilarity as people try to remember each other’s name. By the end of the game they are likely to remember quite a few!

Name Cushion

You need a cushion for this one!

In a standing circle, throw a cushion to someone and say your name.

When most folks have learnt enough names, change the rules to: ‘Throw the cushion to someone and say their name as you throw.’

Name Crescendo

In a standing circle, all together crouch down low and whisper your name, getting louder as you gradually stand up and go on tiptoe. After the crescendo, get smaller and quieter as you go down to crouch and whisper. Then one person at a time states his name and leads the group in a crescendo of his name.

Name Echo

In a standing circle, one person says his name with any sound and action.

The group echoes this twice. Everyone takes a turn, going round the circle.

Alternatively, each participant comes into the centre of the circle for his turn.

A hilarious variation is for the whole process to slowly speed up.

Terrific Teresa

Again the group is in a standing circle. Take turns to introduce yourselves by adding a word before your name, beginning with the same letter. It works well to enact the character suggested in the words: *Jumping Jeremy/Lascivious Liz/Gorgeous George*.

On paper, this kind of game looks unbelievably corny. Whether it is in practice or not depends on the spirit of the moment. It can be hilarious when entered into fully and played to the hilt, but completely destroyed by cynicism. Cynicism is a destroyer not only of play but of love and all tender emotions.

Fantasy Names and Introductions

Get everyone to partner up and spend a minute or two to think of a fantasy self and tell this to your partner. Back in the circle, your partner will then introduce this fantasy you, and in turn you introduce his own fantasy self.

For example: 'Introducing Peerless Pete the Aviator; just back from navigating the globe' (Pete 'flies' into the circle).

'Ladies and gentlemen, we are honoured to be in the presence this evening of Big Mac, the belly dancer from Brighton.' (I can't imagine what kind of action that would lead to!)

'I am delighted to introduce Dame Edna Beverage, the tea lady from Ruislip.' (Edna mimes offering tea and whatever around the circle.)

Movement and Sound Games

These games take place in a standing circle. They are simple, mainly repetitive in structure and allow for endless creativity and spontaneity.

Movement Crescendo

This is a game which can be played with any number from about 6 to 40, even more if the leader has a loud voice!

The group is in a standing circle. The leader starts a simple movement and sound – small and quiet.

The group mirrors the leader, who then makes the movement and sound bigger and louder, and begins to move towards the centre.

The group follows, and everyone simultaneously moves forward until it builds to a crescendo. Everyone moves out again and the activity gets smaller and quieter until it fades away. Another member of the group starts another movement and sound, and so on.

VARIATION

It can become hilarious when words take over from sounds.

For example, 'This is ridiculous' or "Ello, 'ello, what's going on 'ere then?' or 'Shhh, be quiet' – which then inevitably ends up being shouted loudly!

This game is about letting go and being leader as well as follower. It is good for several people to take a turn at leading and in particular it is very good for shy people to lead. Also, it is good to encourage people to let a movement and sound 'come through them', not to think intellectually about what to do and so get stuck in trying to 'get it right'.

Sound and Movement Round

The leader creates a quick and simple sound and movement and passes it to the next person, who passes it on and so on around the circle.

VARIATIONS

1. The same sound and movement is passed around, e.g. the sound 'huh' together with a movement.
2. The movement and sound can change as it goes around.
3. The movement and sound does change with each person.
4. Pass the same movement and sound onwards, or a different one backwards around the circle.

This is a good opener. Simple and quick, it raises energy without taxing either shyness or improv skills, and lets those who are shy pass it on quickly, while those who aren't shy may enjoy a few moments of creativity (and those who like to show off have an opportunity to do so!).

Hot Coals

The leader begins playing with imaginary hot coals and it soon becomes clear what they are. Then she passes the hot coals on to the next player in the circle, who receives them and plays with them until they become something else (or stay hot coals) and so on around the circle. Alternatively, they can be passed across or to anyone in the circle.

Pass the Clap

The leader starts a clap, the next person claps and so on round the circle, getting faster and faster until it becomes one long clap.

Or, it goes quickly round but can reverse direction.

Or, it can change on reversing direction to a double clap – or treble clap – and so on.

From here on it's easy to add your own variations:

Face Pass

The leader makes a face and passes it to the next person in the circle.

This person has the choice to pass the same face (or as near as reasonably possible) to the next person in line, or to pass a different face backwards around the circle. And so on.

VARIATION

As soon as the simple structure is understood, add sound to go with the face.

This is a good game for helping people lose a few years and remember childhood. It is also good for losing inhibitions, because it's difficult to keep one's cool in a daft game like this! Also, it works

very well in reconnecting people to the child within. I have found it dissolves resistance in some people who were not moved by other games.

Devils into Angels

This is really a variation on the last game.

The first person in the circle makes a devil-like pose, then turns to one side and faces the next person, who copies the pose and changes it into an angelic pose. He turns to the next person, who copies and changes into a devil and so on.

Imaginary Ball Toss

The leader has an imaginary ball which has size and weight.

The leader throws the 'ball' to another member of the circle, who catches it (probably).

The ball may change shape; for example, it may become a cat when gently handed to the next person, become a biting monster, become a giant when thrown across the circle and then a ladder up which the person mimes climbing and so on.

This is a very simple game but great fun when people let themselves go and the ball begins to change into all sorts of surprising things. I have been amazed at some of the weird things the ball has changed into and some of the wonderful lateral thinking that has come out of it. I tend to let this game go on for quite a long time when it takes off.

Changing Movements

One person goes into the middle and creates a movement with a sound.

He moves around exploring this movement and sound until it feels complete (from ten seconds up to a minute) and then takes it to someone else in the circle who copies it and moves into the centre, while the first person replaces the other in the circle.

The new person then explores the sound and movement, and lets it change organically into a creation of his own and then takes it to another member of the circle – and so on.

The important thing here is to let the sound and movement change organically without the intellect getting in the way.

Humming Circle

The leader hums a note, which the group copies. The leader then starts to hum an improvisation around the note.

When the leader feels she has expressed enough, it is passed to the next person, who becomes the improviser. And so on around the circle.

Orchestra and Conductor

Last, here is a collective game using sound. I was about to write 'music' but I don't remember the game ever quite making it into that exalted realm!

Warm the group up by getting them to hum, and make all sorts of vocal noises.

The group is the orchestra. Arrange them like an orchestra with small groups who contribute certain sounds, and then invite one member to come out front to be the conductor. He then conducts with arms all over the place trying to get some musical order out of what is usually a glorious racket!

This game works best when it is actually a bit orchestrated and organised.